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Letter dated 20 March 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I would like to commend from the outset, the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his well-balanced report of 7 March 2001 to the Security Council (S/2001/202) on Ethiopia and Eritrea. His report clearly outlined the positive progress made so far: difficulties to be overcome, problems to be resolved and, above all, his fears for the peace process, especially if one of the parties does not expeditiously rearrange its forces for the establishment of the Temporary Security Zone. His recommendations on what needs to be done are put succinctly for Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Security Council and the friends of the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) to act upon.

Overall, Ethiopia fully shares the Secretary-General's guarded optimism in resolving the difficulties and problems with the peace mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea. For our part, we are, as we have always been, prepared to continue in ensuring that the problems and difficulties faced by UNMEE and the peace process do not emanate from the Ethiopian side. In paragraph 47 of the report, the Secretary-General, after dwelling on the "potentially dangerous situation" arising from Eritrea's delay of rearranging its forces to allow for the establishment of the Temporary Security Zone, states: "In spite of the fact that overall cooperation between the parties and UNMEE has been satisfactory, a few important issues remain unresolved." Two such issues are mentioned:

(a) The granting to UNMEE by Ethiopia and Eritrea of "unimpeded and unconditional freedom of movement, including the establishment of the most practicable direct high-altitude flights between the two capitals". ***Ethiopia wishes to affirm its willingness to do just that.*** In other words, the Secretary-General's recommendation in paragraph 47 taken together with his clarification in paragraph 28 is fully acceptable to us. For the record, it must also be highlighted that the last time the Secretary-General reported to the Security Council (S/2001/45, para. 19) on this same matter, he had indicated that "the ... issue ... has been resolved". The first successful high-altitude and direct flight between Addis Ababa and Asmara was halted by the other party and not Ethiopia.

(b) The other important issue cited by the Secretary-General is that of the status-of-forces agreement. With regard to Ethiopia, the Secretary-General himself admits there are not many issues — as a matter of fact only two — to be resolved. He hoped that with flexibility on Ethiopia's part, "an agreement will be reached

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soon". In all our negotiations so far with the Secretariat, we have shown a lot of flexibility. In this same spirit, we had put forth proposals on how to resolve this issue as well. The ball has been for some time now in the United Nations Secretariat's court. ***I urge them to move forward and conclude in signing the status-of-forces agreement this week.***

In a letter addressed to you, Mr. President (S/2001/229), the Permanent Representative of Eritrea, transmitting his Government's instructions, assured you that Eritrea "remains committed to respecting, fully and rigorously, all the agreements it has signed". He further indicated that "problems can and will be resolved if the goodwill and seriousness of my Government is reciprocated by the other party". These are solemn words. Normally solemn words one professes to be committed to, are respected and carried out. Unlike Eritrea, Ethiopia has a long track record of scrupulously respecting and carrying out agreements it has signed. We are equally insistent in holding others to implement what had been agreed upon. ***It is now for Eritrea to state, without fudging the issues, whether or not it accepts and is willing to implement the two recommendations of the Secretary-General cited above.***

More immediately, serious and pressing are the questions relating to the establishment of the Temporary Security Zone and information on minefields.

The Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities between Ethiopia and Eritrea of 18 June 2000 committed both countries to carry out certain measures. Ethiopia was to redeploy its forces from positions taken after 6 February 1999 and which were not under its administration before 6 May 1998. This was done by 22 February 2001, four days earlier than was agreed upon by the UNMEE Military Coordination Commission. UNMEE verified this in its report (UNMEE/P10/PR/38) of 7 March 2001. The Force Commander, Maj. Gen. P. Cammaert, himself stated: "I am satisfied with verification of the southern boundary and can now confirm that the ***Ethiopian forces are outside the prospective Temporary Security Zone***" (*emphasis added*). For the Temporary Security Zone to be formally declared, the "goodwill and seriousness" of the other party is needed. They are supposed to be committed to keeping their forces "at a distance of 25 kilometres ... from positions to which Ethiopian forces" had redeployed. The Secretary-General was referring to this refusal by Eritrea, despite its stated intention to the contrary, as "a potentially dangerous situation, which should be expeditiously resolved". We thank the Security Council for also calling for "an expeditious completion of ... the rearrangement of forces necessary for the establishment" of the Temporary Security Zone. We very much hope that the other party does this so that UNMEE may verify the action. It may then be possible for UNMEE to work with all concerned on clearing landmines and unexploded ordnance. This would pave the way for the displaced population to return to their areas. On this issue of submitting information on minefields, Ethiopia handed over to UNMEE on 11 March 2001, 10 dangerous area survey reports from areas within the Temporary Security Zone. The UNMEE Mine Action Coordination Centre referred to this as "***the first significant handover of landmine information since UNMEE arrived in the region***". As I write these notes, I am informed that Eritrea has just submitted also information on minefields. This is welcome.

It is not my intention here to enter into unnecessary polemics (we have had enough of these) with my Eritrean counterpart. However, I would be remiss in my duties were I to ignore two of the many misleading statements contained in his

above-cited communication to the Council. He writes "Eritrea did not detain Ethiopian civilians." Thousands have been detained. They were not "trapped", as alleged by the Eritrean Government, but systematically rounded up from many towns, including Asmera. The detention and the mistreatment of Ethiopian civilians remains a serious concern to the Ethiopian Government. With regard to the Eritrean prisoners of war (no civilian is under Ethiopian detention), the International Committee of the Red Cross has been accorded access from the beginning of the conflict — something not done by Eritrea until much pressure was exerted by the international community.

The allegation of destroying homes and villages does not even warrant serious comment. It has no foundation. It is simply made to cover up for what the other side did to bustling towns like Zalambessa.

On the last point, of Ethiopia's challenge to one of the Commissioners appointed by Eritrea to the Boundary Commission, this is not the venue for airing and resolving the issue. Suffice it to say that, according to the Algiers Agreement of 12 December 2000, either party may challenge any of the Commissioners appointed by the other side. We have exercised that right. There are procedures and rules under which this challenge and any other will be dealt with.

I will conclude by reconfirming that Ethiopia has already carried out some of the recommendations put forward by the Secretary-General, and the urgings of the Security Council. We are, as I have stated above, ***ready to carry out the remaining ones***. In our case, implementing these depends on how quickly the United Nations Secretariat wants this done. Let the other party in the peace process go beyond rhetoric and truly implement what it committed itself to do.

I would be grateful were you to have this letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Abdulmejid **Hussein**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative